

COMMENTARY

During the past few months, public opinion on both sides of the Atlantic has been stirred by controversies over the best means to break the political deadlock between the Western world and the Soviet bloc. In opening its pages to a discussion of these issues by four well-known writers—two American, H. STUART HUGHES and HANS J. MORGENTHAU, and two British, DENIS HEALEY and G. F. HUDSON—COMMENTARY intends to make a modest contribution to this debate. Despite important differences in evaluating the past and future effectiveness of the policies pursued by the Western governments and military staffs during the "cold war" period, all four contributors share the conviction that America and Europe must confront their perils jointly.

THE TURN OF THE TIDE

Western Diplomacy in the Sputnik Era

H. STUART HUGHES

ONE of the deepest of the many obscurities in the understanding of history surrounds the problem of when and how large numbers of people decisively change their minds. Again and again in our studies we historians are confronted by a situation that seems to defy explanation in the terms to which we are accustomed: a sudden shift of mass emotion, a new enthusiasm that has swept through an entire community, or the equally unanticipated collapse of some popular credence. Events such as these fly in the face of our most cherished prejudices. We have been trained to think of history in terms of slow

change and gradual development. We are at a loss to account for the sudden and the catastrophic.

In my own case, as, I judge, in that of many other teachers of history, it was a reading of *War and Peace* that first opened my eyes to a more satisfactory understanding of the past. One of the great merits, it seems to me, of Tolstoy's novel is that it conveys a sense of events as actually in the process of occurring. As conventionally written and taught, history is too orderly: the historian knows the outcome, and this knowledge infuses his account with a quality of inevitability to which the participants in the events themselves were total strangers. In *War and Peace* the full disorder of actual occurrence is restored to history: with a disarming innocence of manner, the author leads his reader into the very center of events until the latter quite unexpectedly

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finds himself caught up in the doubts and fears of the historical actors.

It is Tolstoy's picture of General Kutusov at the Battle of Borodino that conveys most arrestingly what I have in mind. Kutusov, we may recall, is far from being in control of events. He knows this—yet at the same time he knows that it is expected of him that he appear to be in control. It is up to him to incarnate the conviction of the Russian people that the French invaders will be repulsed and ultimately expelled from the country. Kutusov does not quite know how this is to be done—his mind is shrewd, but imprecise and slow-moving—yet he shares the popular conviction that it will in some fashion be accomplished. He also knows that a battle is expected of him, although he is quite sure that a battle will settle nothing. It will be only useless slaughter—but a battle before Moscow is essential to the popular faith. Hence he sits overlooking the field of Borodino—massive, imperturbable, apparently half-asleep—simply *representing* in admirably tangible fashion the unshakable conviction of his people, ostensibly directing a battle which, like the wider course of the war itself, is quite beyond his control.

Why, then, does he sit so stolid in his confidence? Because at some point in the past weeks it has dawned on him that time is on his side. Vaguely, gropingly, like the soldiers and peasants who trust in him, he has arrived at the belief that Napoleon can be stopped. The exact outlines of the future are still impenetrable. But the final result can each day be more clearly discerned. And on the other side, in the ranks of the Emperor's Grand Army, there is simultaneously appearing the beginnings of panic, of a loss of confidence that will soon become a rout.

This passage from hope to despair, or from fear to confidence, is what the physiologists or psychologists would call crossing a threshold. It is a process compounded of countless individual alterations in sentiment that are too minute for the historian to trace. Their sum, however, amounts to a psychological revolution. These gusts and shifts of popular emotion are obviously not as sudden as they

seem. They are prepared over long periods and by subterranean processes at which we can do little more than guess. But when the change *does* appear on the surface, it comes with a rush. As in the case of Montaigne's peasant girl who found that she could no longer perform her morning routine of lifting her pet calf, the change may well appear from one day to the next, almost without warning, and totally disproportionate to its apparent "cause."

The decisive feature of such a change is this: as opposed to the more usual alterations in opinion of which we read in our daily newspaper, it involves the passive and inarticulate majority of society. It spreads beyond the ranks of the articulate and the politically committed to affect the opinion of those who scarcely know what their own sentiments are. One fine morning the man totally uninterested in public affairs unexpectedly wakes up to a new conviction.

It is one of these enormous changes that has taken place in American and world opinion since the Russians launched their Sputnik five months ago. And in consequence the relationship of this country to its allies, and to the uncommitted nations, has been radically altered in a fashion of which we are only just beginning to be aware.

WITHOUT some such hypothesis about how large masses of people lose an old conviction or reach a new one, we should be at a loss to account for the great and permanent alterations of sentiment in our common past. We should not be able to understand, for example, how rather suddenly in the middle of the 17th century religion came to seem a matter no longer worth fighting over, and the religious boundaries of Europe settled down to the outlines that have remained virtually unchanged until this day. Similarly, we should be in no position to assess those curious and recurring situations in which a war has gone on so long that the antagonists have almost forgotten their original aims—the situation depicted by Jonathan Swift, in his *Conduct of the Allies*, of a coalition that has in effect

accomplished what it set out to do, and now is held together simply by a kind of habit of warfare in common: in such circumstances, almost overnight the popular pressure for an immediate peace may become overwhelming.

By the same process, and closer to our own time, I think we are just beginning to understand—or rather, we are beginning to revive our understanding—of the mentality that was responsible for the Munich pact of 1938. Once more, it was hindsight that for nearly two decades made the motives of the men of Munich incomprehensible to us. In the light of the war that followed, the conduct of leaders like Chamberlain and Daladier seemed merely fatuous. Today however—since the events of last autumn—we are in a better position to appreciate the problem they faced. Once more we can begin to understand the mentality of peace at any price. For what our President and the leaders of a number of the allied governments have in effect been saying to us has been very close to just that. In more acceptable terminology, perhaps, they have declared that war is “unthinkable” under present circumstances of anticipated mutual destruction. When one says that war is “unthinkable,” one means quite literally that one is unwilling to think about it. The alternative to peace has been foreclosed.

In 1938 also, war for the Western democracies was unthinkable. Chamberlain and Daladier knew it: they judged their own peoples correctly, and acted accordingly. The difference between the two of them was simply this: Chamberlain had illusions about the future, and Daladier had none. The latter knew that the war would eventually have to be fought—but he also knew that this was morally impossible so long as the inarticulate mass of the French people was unprepared to accept the idea. A year later he saw no alternative to taking the plunge—but his people were still unready. The decisive difference between the war effort of the French and of the British in the first phase of the conflict was that the latter had time to wake up to the psychological

necessities of warfare, while the former were overwhelmed before they were really awake. In the sense of a profound moral shift, the Second World War did not begin for the Western democracies in September of 1939, but nine months later when the British found themselves standing alone.

IT MAY be painful for us to recognize—but it is imperative that we do so if we are to face our future with a minimum of mental clarity—that what we have witnessed in the past few months among the Western European peoples has been a profound psychological change in *the opposite direction* from what occurred in Britain and what began to occur in the United States in the summer of 1940. Then the passage was from apathy to belligerence; today it is the reverse. This latter process has been in the making for quite a while. It was already apparent at least as early as the Geneva conference of two and a half years ago. For a long time now a loss of confidence within the populations of the Western coalition has imperceptibly been gaining momentum. Since the launching of Sputnik it has become a near rout.

A year after Suez and Hungary, the consequences of what the United States had done—or better, failed to do—about those two events had come home to roost. The American failure to go to the aid of the Hungarian revolution had exposed the folly of arousing false hopes through loose talk about the “liberation” of Eastern Europe. The irresponsibility of a policy that could imply such a promise, and then do nothing at all to redeem it, was something that even the hardened public relations experts of the Eisenhower administration were unable to explain away. Similarly in the case of Suez, it soon became transparently clear that the American government, by its inexplicable indecision and shifts of policy, had driven its two oldest and most important allies to an act of desperation. A few weeks afterward, the Western alliance had been restored in appearance—but the old sense of mutual confidence had all but vanished.

Confidence and trust were no longer the same, but there remained the potent argument of America's military might. This last belief the launching of Sputnik shook up mightily: within a day or two the Soviet lead in missiles became an open secret. The result was a noiseless *saute qui peut*. The uncommitted governments quietly drew the conclusion that the balance of power had shifted from Washington to Moscow, and made their provisions accordingly. The NATO powers behaved more politely: in form they remained committed to the American alliance, but as neutralist rumblings from their own populations grew louder, the more peripheral of them began to cast around for new formulas that would loosen the Western coalition without dissolving it entirely.

It was doubtless only the presence of President Eisenhower that saved the NATO conference at Paris from catastrophe. His trip was an act of physical courage, and as such it was quite properly applauded by the Europeans who witnessed the feat. But Eisenhower at Paris was in no position to act even as a symbol—to play the role of a Kutusov sitting half-asleep on his hill. Whatever he might symbolize no longer inspired confidence: behind him lay the image of an administration paralyzed by indecision and notably lacking in heroic resolve. Under these circumstances, all the President could do was to suggest the half-legendary chivalry of that blind old King of Bohemia who was hoisted aboard his charger to ride off to ineffectual combat at the Battle of Crécy.

Again, the devoted efforts of the administration propagandists could not conceal the vacuum in leadership that the Paris conference had brought to light. It was fortunate for the United States that Dr. Adenauer was there to serve as mediator—to bridge the gap between the policy of Secretary Dulles and that of the quasi-neutralist Scandinavians. But even Adenauer came up with nothing more substantial than a face-saving formula, trading a nearly meaningless American pledge to talk with the Russians against

an equally ambiguous European pledge to talk about accepting American missile protection. Adenauer could provide stop-gap leadership, but no more. The German Chancellor rendered a last service by saving the United States from public humiliation. Yet for the alliance as a whole it was apparent that the old and familiar danger was impending—that in the face of the yawning divergencies in national attitudes which the Paris conference had revealed, it might be little more than the habit and routine of action in common that was still holding the coalition together.

SO MUCH for our present situation as seen in some sort of historical perspective. It is a grim picture, but I do not think I have overdrawn it. In brief, it is a picture of military inferiority and incompetence in leadership suddenly and brutally revealed.

Now what of the future? Obviously, as commentator after commentator has reiterated in the past four months, a policy leading from weakness is a radically different sort of thing from a policy that leads from strength. This crucial distinction our present administration appears constitutionally unable to grasp. And until they grasp it American policy will remain what it is today—vacillating, uncertain, and, on occasion, dangerously truculent.

Five imperatives, I think, logically arise out of the present situation. The first of these is to begin to tell the truth to the American people. The past five years have witnessed the apotheosis of the public relations artist: the cult of slickness and of meaninglessness has become the hallmark of the Eisenhower administration. One is even led to wonder whether the American people is any longer prepared to hear the truth—whether the intestinal strength of the nation has been so far undermined by the diet of pap on which it has been force-fed that a sudden infusion of stark fact might prove too much for it. In any case, to run this risk is better than the alternative. For the fragmentary evidence we possess suggests that the worldwide loss of confidence

in American leadership has already begun to affect our own people. The inarticulate mass of Americans apathetic to public affairs have been deeply shaken in their self-image of technological superiority. Once the faith of these people is upset it is exceedingly hard to restore it. It is possible, indeed probable, that this country is currently undergoing a crisis of conscience as thoroughgoing as any that it has experienced since the Civil War.

Obviously the corollary to telling the stern truth is an American armaments program at a level that the current proposals do not remotely approach. The Democratic leaders in Congress were on strong ground when they insisted that even today the administration has not really awakened to the national peril. This second imperative is so apparent that it scarcely needs to be argued. The third is only superficially in conflict with it. In a situation of military inferiority—even though it may be only temporary—to keep the peace and to hold on to one's own temper are no more than common sense. Under such circumstances, a strategy of delay is unavoidable. And one of the best ways to delay is to keep talking with the potential enemy. A series of conferences—summit or otherwise—with the Soviet leaders is not likely to accomplish very much. But there is the off chance that it *may* accomplish something. Meantime the demand in Europe is so overwhelming that the United States would find itself isolated if it should choose to hold out against it.

The fourth imperative is to find some new leadership for the Western coalition and to find it quickly. The Eisenhower administration can no longer provide it. Even the most dramatic of new measures could not restore the confidence that the multiple mistakes of the past five years in foreign and military policy have forfeited. If the United States were a parliamentary state, the administration would long ago have been forced to resign.

At the same time, I am not at all sure that under its present leadership the Democratic party represents much of an alterna-

tive. On the military question its attitude is clear and purposeful. But on the wider issues of foreign policy it has little new to offer. In the recent Acheson-Kennan exchange, the former Secretary of State unquestionably came off better. In taking Kennan sharply to task for the almost mystic imprecision of his proposals for the neutralization of Central Europe, Acheson displayed once again the vigor and clarity of his own lawyer's mind. But in this as in his other recent declarations on foreign affairs, Acheson could suggest little more than a return to the diplomacy of the late 1940's. This was indeed the best period of postwar American foreign policy—a period in which the Western European nations willingly accepted an American lead that was both conciliatory and decisive. But it was also the period of Stalin's final paranoia, and of the American monopoly of atomic weapons. An overriding fear on the part of Western Europeans could find immediate reassurance in American protection. For half a decade now, these special circumstances have no longer obtained. With Stalin dead, the Europeans have breathed more easily, while since the Soviet attainment of the atomic bomb, confidence in American protection has been steadily waning. Under the circumstances of 1958, a return to the Truman-Acheson foreign policy, however successful that policy once was, is a patent impossibility.

MEANTIME, in his dreamy, ruminating fashion, George Kennan has been offering a new outline of policy that has been the sensation of the European season. The response that his BBC (Reith) lectures evoked throughout Western and Central Europe is enough in itself to suggest that American foreign policy is in need of a drastic overhauling. No doubt, as Acheson very correctly pointed out, there were dangerous elements of illusion in what Kennan seemed to expect from his neutralization scheme. But the main body of the proposal struck Europeans as the first imaginative suggestion that had come out of the United States

in nearly a decade. Hence, like the matter of the summit conference, it deserves careful consideration: it would be folly to reject it out of hand.

In the absence of guidance from the United States, can the Europeans themselves provide the Western coalition with the new leadership it so imperatively requires? The outlook is not promising. France and Italy are under just about the weakest governments that they have had since the end of the war. In Germany, Adenauer cannot go on forever—and, in any case, it will still be many years before Europeans are ready to accept the leadership of a German. In Britain, the change from Eden to Macmillan has not been sufficient to efface the memory of Suez. Whatever may be the situation on the domestic front, in foreign policy the Conservatives are running a lame-duck administration. Right now Labor's victory at the next election seems assured.

Between Labor and the Conservatives the positions have been very nearly reversed in the past few years. At the time of its electoral defeat in 1951, Labor was grievously divided, while the Tory challengers were united and militant. Today the Conservatives are almost as uncertain as our own Republicans—torn by dissension over financial policy and shackled in foreign affairs by the imperial nostalgia of their own backbenchers. In opposition, Labor presents more of a unified front than at any period since its electoral victory of 1945. The alliance of Gaitskell and Bevan has given it the most potent team of leaders that the Western world currently affords.

If the British Labor party is fairly shortly to come to power and assume a position of leadership in the Atlantic coalition, then its attitude on foreign policy becomes of immediate relevance. This attitude is a flexible one, well calculated to reconcile the neutralist yearnings of the Continentals with the military emphasis on which the United States insists. For Labor combines a readiness to negotiate with a well-trying imperviousness to Communist blandishments. And in their assessment of the main trend of

Russian foreign policy over the past decade the leaders of British Labor—along with a large number of their Conservative countrymen—have been proved only too correct.

In brief, they have insisted that the major weapon of Communist expansion has been and will continue to be not war but penetration, persuasion, and example rather than terror. And they can point to the spectacular successes of Soviet policy in the Middle East to clinch their argument. By such means, they further suggest, Communist influence will probably continue to grow in the foreseeable future. In the vast underdeveloped stretches of Asia and Africa, it will be extremely difficult to stop this sort of expansion by any of the usual techniques of American resistance to Communism. The fate of the Eisenhower Doctrine in the Middle East is a case in point. A vastly increased program of economic aid might do something—but it will always find its limits in vestigial suspicions of "colonialism."

THE fifth and last imperative, then, implicit in the current situation is to accept the above analysis and begin to act on it. For the corollary of such an assessment of the world ideological balance is a more modest notion of what Western policy can accomplish. More concretely, this sort of reasoning devotes primary attention to the possibilities of division within the Communist world itself. It is less interested in devising complex alliance-systems to deal with all possible military contingencies than in exploring the chances of gaining footholds in the non-Soviet portions of the Communist land-mass. It is more concerned with China and Poland and Yugoslavia than with Formosa and Saudi Arabia and Spain. It stresses the feebleness of a number of the governments that rank as pillars of the anti-Communist alliance system, and argues that there is less to gain by further propping them up than by devoting expert attention to economic and ideological novelties in the more peripheral states of the Soviet bloc and in those that are currently falling under Communist influence.

That there are sharp limits to such novelties this view of foreign policy well recognizes. Here the suppression of the Hungarian revolution was again the decisive event: it proved that change would be permitted to go as far as Gomulka, but no further. It suggested that it was the national rather than the liberal aspect of the heterodox stirrings within the Communist world that ran the better chance of permanent success. And it similarly seemed to prove that the desire to throw off Russian domination was a more compelling concern of Communist dissidents than their longing for freedom of expression. Thus it has appeared symptomatic that the Yugoslavs have found no incompatibility in refusing to go along with the recent Soviet-dictated formula of world Communist solidarity, while almost simultaneously condemning Djilas once again for his ideological deviations.

It would be incorrect, then, to see in this view of Western foreign policy a revival of a "soft" attitude toward Communism or of Popular Front illusions. Even before his re-

cent decision to play the part of a responsible statesman, a leader such as Aneurin Bevan had long ago proved his anti-Communist reliability. And the same is true of innumerable people like him. The illusion of looking for democratic virtue within the Communist system itself is by now dead and nearly forgotten. The support or tolerance that even the more "liberal" of the Communist governments gave to the suppression of the Hungarian revolution destroyed the last traces of it. The attitude that I have been outlining is, rather, one of skepticism and careful calculation. It tries to assess realistically the current chances for Western survival in a situation in which slow deterioration has almost overnight become a major crisis of confidence.

This reassessment suggests that the United States is currently crossing the threshold of a new relation to its Western allies. And it further implies that in her relations with the Communist countries another such threshold must be crossed if the present alarming drift in world affairs is to be arrested.